



Nature's Call

An Activity Newsletter for Kids by Utah's Project WILD -- Winter 1995



Let's Go to the Plateau!

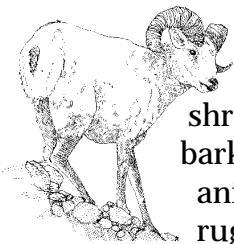
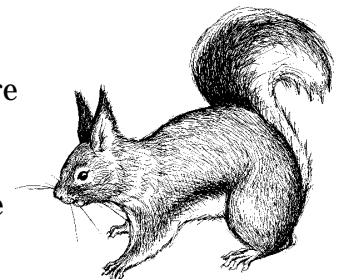
The Colorado Plateau is a large region that stretches across four states: Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. Much of eastern and southern Utah is on the Colorado Plateau. Imagine a large circle that connects the Utah towns of St. George, Monticello, Moab, Vernal and Price. That is a rough boundary of the Colorado Plateau in Utah.

The Colorado Plateau has many different landforms. There are deep canyons like the Grand Canyon and tall mountains like the La Sals. Since there are many different landforms, there are many different ecosystems. You can find the hot, dry Mojave desert near St. George and cool, moist alpine meadows on the La Sal mountains. Let's look at some of the more common ecosystems and wildlife of the region.



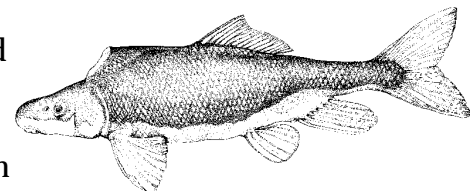
The pinyon-juniper ecosystem covers a vast area on the Colorado Plateau. Both pinyon and juniper trees are conifers. That means they bear cones. The cones of the pinyon tree produce important seeds known as pinyon nuts. Many animals including the pinyon jay eat the tasty seeds. This large crow-like bird will hide seeds in the soil. When the birds get hungry in the winter they will uncover and eat the seeds. Jays do not always find the buried seeds, so some sprout and grow into trees. In this way the pinyon tree has spread over the Colorado Plateau.

The Ponderosa pine ecosystem is found in the mountains. Ponderosa pines are home to a large, tree-dwelling squirrel known as the Abert's squirrel. This squirrel eats the inner bark of ponderosa pine twigs. You can recognize this mammal by its unique ear tufts. In Utah you will find this squirrel only in the ponderosa forests of the Abajo Mountains.



The blackbrush ecosystem covers many miles of southeastern Utah. The dominant plant in this ecosystem is blackbrush. Blackbrush is a densely branched and spiny shrub which can grow up to six feet tall. The plant gets its name because the dark gray bark turns black after a rain. Blackbrush is an important source of food for many animals including the desert bighorn sheep which can be found on top of the dry, rugged canyons of southeastern Utah.

Aquatic ecosystems are important to many plants and animals of the region. Some unique animals like the razorback sucker have evolved in the mighty Colorado River. Nature has selected the unusual physical trait that gives the fish its name. The fish's razor-like back acts like the keel of a boat. This bony structure helps the fish swim in the fast waters of spring runoff.



Turn the page to explore the wild world of the Colorado Plateau!

Canyon Creatures

Where do these plants and animals live?

Over millions of years, rivers in the Colorado Plateau have carved deep canyons. These canyons provide shelter for many wild animals. Listed below is a description of plants and animals that live in these canyons. Draw a line from each description to the animal or plant you think it best describes. Then draw the plants and animals on the next page in places where you think they might live. Good luck!!

1. Predatory insect known for its ability to hover.



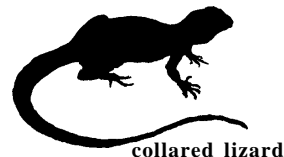
dragonfly

2. Pine tree valued for its seeds.



great-horned owl

3. Member of crow family which buries pinyon pine seeds.



collared lizard



Hopi chipmunk

4. Unusually shaped fish native to Colorado River.



razorback sucker

5. Spiny shrub which many animals feed upon.



pinyon jay

6. Nocturnal bird of prey known for its nighttime call.



juniper

7. Reptile which makes a rattling sound when threatened.



canyon tree-frog

8. Mammal known for collecting shiny objects and hiding them in its nest. Often called a pack rat.



pinyon pine

9. Shrub known for its unique aroma.



desert woodrat

10. Small striped mammal which eats the seeds of the juniper tree.



sage brush

11. Tree which bears blue-colored fruit. This conifer is often called "cedar."



blackbrush

12. Reptile often seen "sunning" itself on a rock.

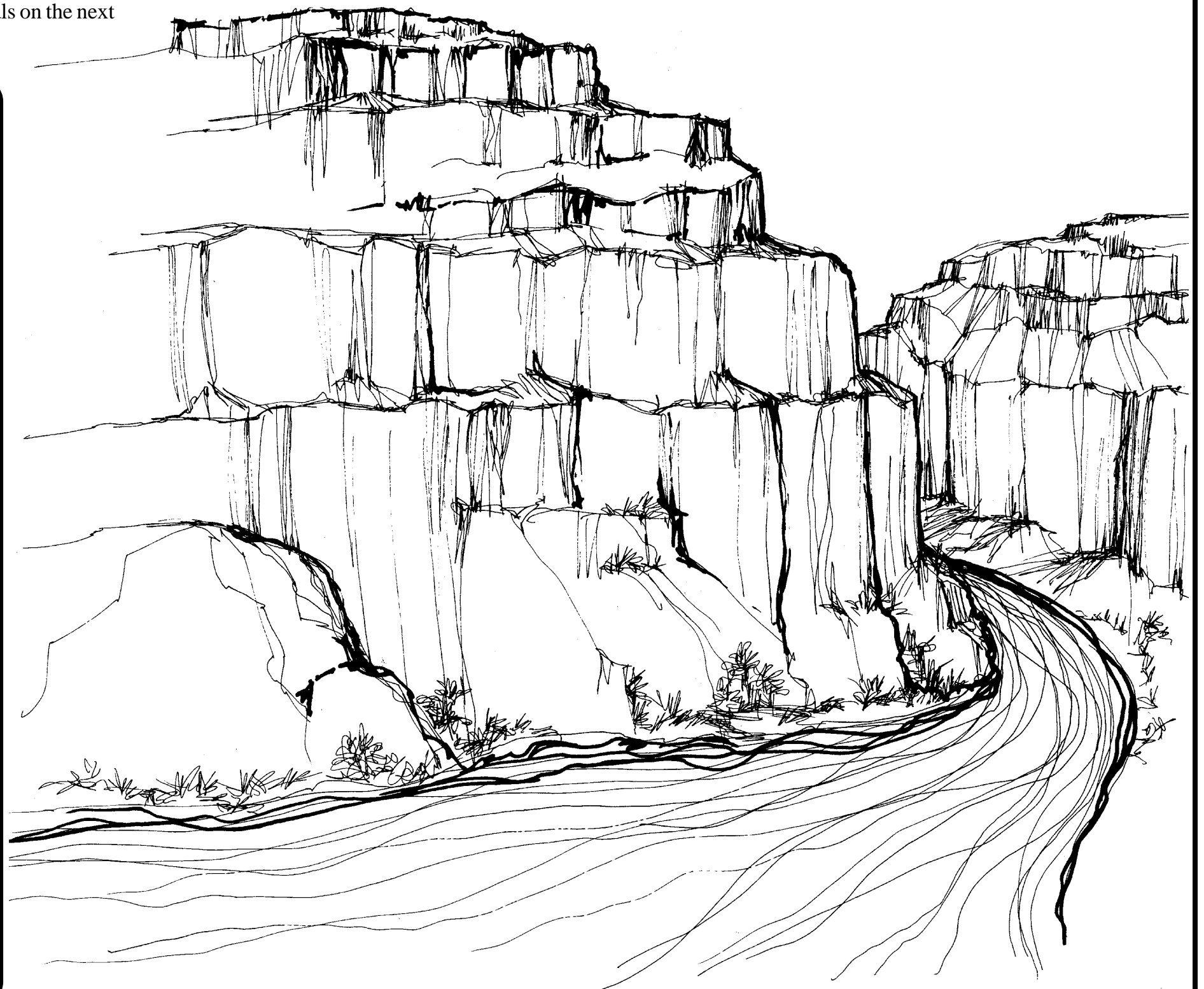


rattlesnake

13. Amphibian which has pad-like toes.

prairie falcon

14. Bird of prey which nests on ledges and hunts song birds.



Complete this Colorado Plateau food web by using these animals: **beaver, Albert's squirrel, short-horned lizard, cougar, harvester ant, pinyon jay, Cooper's hawk, mule deer, carrion beetle, great-horned owl and coyote**. Write the name of the animals on the line below the correct box. After naming the animals, color the circles and boxes. **Green** is for producers. **Blue** is for consumers. **Yellow** is for decomposers.

